teacher resource guide

schooltime performance series

turning 15 on the road to freedom

Written by Lynda Blackmon Lowery

arts education njpac
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Lynda Blackmon Lowery, who still lives in Selma, wrote an illustrated, award-winning memoir for young readers about her experience as a marcher in the Selma Movement: Turning 15 On The Road To Freedom: My Story of the 1965 Selma Voting Rights March. Writers Elspeth Leacock and Susan Buckley helped Lowery with the memoir while P. J. Loughran illustrated evocative images to go with the text. Today, Lowery is a speaker on civil rights issues and works as a case manager at a mental health center. "I would like for young people to know that each day of your life is a journey into history. You have the ability to change something each day of your life. Believe it or not, people, it can't happen without you," she said in an interview with NPR.

During the melee on Bloody Sunday, Lowery was tear-gassed and beaten. She came away with 7 stitches over her right eye and 28 stitches on the back of her head. She still has those scars to this day. "I like to tell people by the age of 15 I had been jailed nine times. The first time we actually went to jail, I was kind of scared. But we had each other's back. What we were going to do with each other's backs, I don't know, because those big policemen had guns and so forth. But we were there for each other," she said.

Lynda has been an incredibly generous part of our collaboration. She has shared a painful yet triumphant story with us, little by little. And she never ceases to amaze us with her empathy, determination, love, and bravery in the face of terror, it hit us, we can work together to bring a larger story to young adults everywhere. That's when we began writing Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom together.

What was it like to work with Lynda Blackmon Lowery?
Working with Lynda has been one of the greatest experiences of both of our lives! For the several years it took us to write the book together and the three years since its publication, we have become the closest of friends, a threesome, who admire and love one another deeply. Lynda has been an incredibly generous part of our collaboration. She has shared a painful yet triumphant story with us, little by little. And she never ceases to include us in the praise she receives for telling her story.

How was the idea of the book born?
Actually, we told Lynda's story twice. The first time was in our book Journeys for Freedom which includes 20 true stories of American history. For that book, we wanted a story of a young person who participated in the voting rights movement in Selma, so we called the small museum there and had the extraordinary luck to have Lynda's sister JoAnne pick up the phone. It was she who brought the three of us together.

After that book was published, we began to make presentations to teachers and children with Lynda and got to know and love her. As we marveled at Lynda's powerful story, we invited her to be our consultant. Once she agreed, we knew we had found the perfect subject to tell our history of terror, it hit us, we can work together to bring a larger story to young adults everywhere. That's when we began writing Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom together.

What was the idea of the performance?
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After that book was published, we began to make presentations to teachers and children with Lynda and got to know and love her. As we marveled at Lynda's powerful story, we invited her to be our consultant. Once she agreed, we knew we had found the perfect subject to tell our story. She was a dynamic and moving account of her story. Told in powerful words and songs from the movement, a talented ensemble cast conveys to the audience what Lowery and other activists had to endure in the fight for freedom.

The production team has been holding performances of this theater piece across the country to wide acclaim. In 2016 at the Montgomery C. Smith Intermediate School in Alabama in 1965. On that day, forever dubbed Bloody Sunday, state police attacked nonviolent protesters, including Lowery, who was injured in the melee. Another famous first march from Selma to Montgomery, the March, the key people involved, and the voting rights movement overall.

Did you watch a performance? What was your reaction?
I would like for young people to know that each day of your life is a journey into history. You have the ability to change something each day of your life. Believe it or not, people, it can't happen without you," she said in an interview with NPR.

As Lynda says at the end of Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom, Lynda Blackmon Lowery is a dynamic and moving account of her story. Told in powerful words and songs from the movement, a talented ensemble cast conveys to the audience what Lynda and other activists had to endure in the fight for freedom.

Why do you think Lowery's story resonates with people?
First of all, the fact that it is a first-person story, not a nonfiction account, allows readers (and viewers) to identify with Lynda. And in telling her story, Lynda shows her vulnerability, her fears, and her determination in ways that can inspire others.

What do you hope kids will take away from the story?
She wants young people to know that they can be history makers, just like her.
## NJ Student Learning Standards

### English Language Arts

#### NJSLSA.SL.1

1. **Performance**
   - 1.1 The Creative Process
   - 1.2 The Creative Process
   - 1.3 Performance

#### NJSLSA.SL.2

1. **Performance**
   - 1.1 The Creative Process
   - 1.2 The Creative Process
   - 1.3 Performance

### Visual & Performing Arts

#### NJSLSA.VPA.1

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### Social Studies

#### NJSLSA.SS.1

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### inspired ideas in the classroom

#### Teacher Focus

**Prepare for the performance**

- **If you have...** 15 minutes: Introduce Lynda Blackmon Lowery with the NPR audio interview “Biloxi Memor" Recalling Marching in Selma At Just 15” (Credit: NPR Book Notes)
- **If you have...** 30 minutes: Have the students view the video of excerpted scenes from a performance of the stage play Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom (Credit: Turning 15 on the Road)

**Experience the performance**

- **If you have...** 45 minutes: Have the students view the video of excerpted scenes from a performance of the stage play Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom (Credit: Turning 15 on the Road)

**Reflect, respond and read**

- **If you have...** 30 minutes: Have the students read an excerpt from the book Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom (Credit: Turning 15 on the Road)

**Focus**

- **If you have...** 30 minutes: For grades 4-6: Have the students watch video clips of Marley Dias speaking about her #1000BlackGirlBooks campaign about diversity in literature (Credit: Scholastic)

**Originate**

- **If you have...** 45 minutes: Discuss how watching a live concert differs from a static recording. Encourage the students to watch and listen for key moments and features of the theatrical performance.

**Rehearse**

- **If you have...** 30 minutes: Ask students for a written response about their favorite moments from the stage play. Have the students read an excerpt from the book Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom (Lynda Blackmon Lowery).

**Make magic**

- **If you have...** 15 minutes: Prepare a campaign to raise awareness for your issue. Plan a campaign to raise awareness for your issue.

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### Student Activity

**Prepare for the performance**

- **If you have...** 15 minutes: Listen to the interview with Lynda Blackmon Lowery and discuss the following:
  - Lynda Blackmon Lowery was only 14 when she started marching for Voting Rights.
  - Why was this cause important to someone so young?
  - How do you feel about children being involved in protests?

**Experience the performance**

- **If you have...** 45 minutes: Watch the video of Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom, and discuss the following:
  - How does the production use live singing and recorded audio to tell the story?
  - What expectations does the set up for the audience?

**Reflect, respond and read**

- **If you have...** 30 minutes: Write about the part of the live stage play that resonated with you most.

**Focus**

- **If you have...** 30 minutes: Watch the video clips and answer the following:
  - What do Marley Dias and Lynda Blackmon Lowery have in common?

**Originate**

- **If you have...** 45 minutes: Have each group plan a campaign to raise awareness for their issue. Plan a campaign to raise awareness for your issue.

**Rehearse**

- **If you have...** 30 minutes: Prepare: Make preparations to roll out your campaign in a timely fashion. Remember to promote to your target audience ahead of time to ensure your message reaches as many people as possible.

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The Story Behind the Selma Movement

One of the marches, the Selma to Montgomery March, was held in Alabama in March 1965. The march was organized by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to protest the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The marchers were attacked by local police and the Alabama State Guard, resulting in the deaths of several protesters and the wounding of dozens more.

Following the attack, the Selma Movement was called to action. The primary goal was to ensure that African Americans and the poor had the right to vote. In one nighttime march on February 18, 1965, activists were protesting in Marion, Alabama in Perry County. Activists then decided to do third march, which began on March 21 and lasted for five days. Each day, they marched from Selma to Montgomery but were met with strong resistance from state and local police. The march was eventually called off due to violent means to curtail people's desire to exercise their constitutional right of the vote.

The Selma Movement in Alabama first started when the Voting Rights Act of 1965 made many of these tactics illegal. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 made many of these tactics illegal. It was a harrowing time. Ordinary folks like Lynda Blackmon Lowery who were targeted by the police, and courageous heroes like Martin Luther King, Jr, and James Bevel, a leader of the SCLC, who were inspired social activism in subsequent generations.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 made many of these tactics illegal, but the long road to get there was arduous, filled with courage and dedication. The Selma Movement that arose in the 1960s was part of the Civil Rights Movement, which aimed to end segregation and discrimination against African Americans.

The Selma Movement was part of the broader Civil Rights Movement, which called for an end to racial segregation and discrimination. Activists used a range of tactics, including nonviolent protests and civil disobedience, to achieve their goals. The movement was marked by significant achievements, including the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Selma Movement is remembered as a key moment in the struggle for civil rights in the United States.

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“They told us we wouldn’t get here. And there were those who said that we would get here only over their dead bodies,” said King. “But all the world today knows that we are here and we are standing before the forces of power in the state of Alabama saying, ‘We ain’t goin’ let nobody turn us around.’”

The photos from the marches and media coverage of the dead and beaten highlighted for a large swath of the American people the dangers that activists were enduring and the need to dismantle Jim Crow laws and voting restrictions. There was a large outcry in the country over what had happened. Made to move by these powerful forces, Congress put together the Voting Rights Act with President Lyndon B. Johnson signing it into law on August 6, 1965.

It made many of the voting obstacles that states like Alabama had enacted illegal. It also established federal oversight of states who have historically denied black people and poor white the right to vote. These states could not make any changes to voting practices without first getting approval or preclearance from the Department of Justice. Long considered a landmark piece of civil-rights legislation, it suffered a significant setback when the Supreme Court issued a ruling that gutted a key provision in the act in 2013. Soon after, many polling places in African American communities were shut down, thereby possibly reducing voting turnout.

Today, activists are working to expand voting opportunities and increase voter registration despite obstacles like the 2013 Supreme County ruling, onerous voter ID laws, purges of voting rolls, and racial gerrymandering.

“Let us stand with a greater determination.
And let us move on in these powerful days,
these days of challenge to make America
what it ought to be.
We have an opportunity to make America
a better nation.
And I want to thank God once more for allowing me to be here with you.”
– Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

**Vocabulary**

**Civil War**
The conflict between the North and South states in America from April 12, 1861 to May 9, 1865. The central question that gave impetus to the conflict was over slavery and whether Southern states could continue to hold people in bondage.

**Grandfather clause**
A law that stipulated that a person could vote if a previous generation had a record of voting before the Civil War. This was an example of a Jim Crow voting restriction tactic. It was also a way to make sure poor whites, who could not meet other voting sanctions like the poll tax, could still vote.

**Jim Crow**
A political, economic, and social system of white supremacy widespread in the South after the Civil War and the Reconstruction Era. It was an apartheid system that discriminated against African Americans by denying them access to the same facilities that white people could use, such as schools, water fountains, lunchtime counters, etc. It permeated every aspect of black life in the South. Voting restrictions were also part of Jim Crow.

**Ku Klux Klan**
A violent, white supremacist terrorist organization formed after the Civil War with the intention of suppressing and disenfranchising African Americans.

**Literacy tests**
A Jim Crow law that mandated that people had to pass a reading and writing test before getting the opportunity to vote. This caused many African Americans to be disenfranchised.

**Non-violent resistance**
A civil disobedience tactic meant to confront suppressive authority. Activists do not respond to acts of violence with violence but instead with peaceful disobedience such as marching, boycotts, getting arrested, occupying facilities, sit ins, and other tactics. Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi, Henry David Thoreau, and other notable philosophers and activists have shaped and put into action the theories of non-violent resistance against an evil system.

**Poll tax**
A Jim Crow law that mandated that people had to pay a tax before registering to vote.

**Racial gerrymandering**
When voter district lines are drawn to suppress the power of racial minorities and thus preventing them from voting their preferred candidates.

**Reconstruction Era**
The period after the Civil War that saw America trying to heal the divisions in the states and grapple with the emancipation of African Americans from slavery. It had some successes with black people ascending to higher office. But Southern states violently fought against the enfranchisement of blacks by enacting Jim Crow laws.

**Voter ID laws**
Laws that require people to show ID before voting. They were passed by state legislatures due to concern about widespread voting fraud, which has turned out to be false, according to numerous news reports. Voting fraud is a rare occurrence, according to news reports and academic papers. Some studies have shown strict voting laws have suppressed minority turnout.

**Voting roll purges**
The way for states to cleanse their voting rolls of people who have died or moved away or are infrequent voters. Voting rights activists say this tactic has impacted at a larger rate minorities. There have been documented instances of people intending to vote but discovering they have been purged from the rolls.

**White supremacy**
An idea that whites are superior to black people and other races and ethnicities and that whites should be dominant over these other groups. This racist ideology could be encoded explicitly in law such as voting restrictions or implicitly in the way black people and other ethnicities are treated in the public or private sphere. Implicit strains of white supremacy may manifest itself in the adverse treatment of black students versus white students in schools, the care of black mothers in hospitals, or the how black and Latinx people are busted at a larger rate for drug use and other low-level offenses compared to whites.
**Resources**

**Websites**
- Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom, theater performance website: turning15ontheroad.com
- Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom, book page: penguingrandslouisa.com/books/315217
- Lynda Blackmon Lowery NPR interview: npr.org/2015/02/17/377592756/
- Selma Marcher inspires students
- Ally Sheedy, IMDb page
- Damaras Obi, Backstage profile
- National Voting Rights Museum and Institute
- Selma to Montgomery March Trail
- Selma to Montgomery, Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Research & Education Institute
- kingsstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/selma-montgomery-march

**Videos**
- Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom, video excerpt
- Interview with Ally Sheedy and Damaras Obi
- March from Selma to Montgomery
- American Freedom Stories | Biography
- The Obamas March in Selma

**Books**
- Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom: My Story of the 1965 Selma Voting Rights March
- Lynda Blackmon Lowery, Speak, 2016
- Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years, 1954-1985
- The Story of the Selma Voting Rights Marches in Photographs
- (The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in Photographs)
- David Arocha, Fristart Pub Inc, 2014
- The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation
- Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, Vintage, 2007
- If You Were a Kid During the Civil Rights Movement
- Gwendolyn Hooks and Kelly Kennedy, C. Press/F. Watts Trade, 2017
- Peaceful Fights for Equal Rights
- Rob Sanders, Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2018

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- Sharon Adarlo, Teacher Resource Guide Writer

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**The Arts in Your School**

**In-School Residencies**
- Drama + Social Studies. Dance + Math. It all adds up in NJPAC’s In-School Residencies in which professional teaching artists partner with educators to bring the arts into the classroom. Each 7- to 10-week program culminates in a student performance or an interactive family workshop. All programs address state and national standards. NJPAC is the regional provider in New Jersey for international arts programs like the NJ Wolf Trap Program and Dancing Classrooms Global.

**Assemblies**
- NJPAC presents engaging school assembly programs that are presented by professional artists that invite students into the enchanting world of live performance. NJPAC’s assembly series promotes cultural awareness and invigorates learning by presenting works that are connected to your school’s curriculum.

**Professional Development**
- NJPAC Professional Development engages classroom teachers, arts specialists and teaching artists as integrated teams that combine arts pedagogy, content, classroom management and social behavioral strategies to ignite and inspire arts-rich classrooms. Working as a team empowers teachers to share practice and strategy. Our goal is to inspire artistic and intellectual capacities in students, building competence and confidence in both students and teachers.

**Study the Arts at NJPAC**

**Saturday Programs**
- NJPAC’s Saturday programs are geared towards students at every level—from those who dream of starring on Broadway to those who are still learning their scales. Students work with professional artists to build technique and develop their own creative style in film, contemporary modern dance, hip hop, jazz, musical theater and symphonic band.

**Summer Programs**
- Want to begin to explore the arts? Or immerse yourself in the study of one genre? Then join us at NJPAC next summer in one of seven programs that spark the creativity in every child through the study of music, dance and theater.
Generous support for Schooltime provided, in part, by
For more information or to schedule an appointment, please call our education sales team at 973.353.7058 or email artseducation@njpac.org. Visit www.njpac.org/education
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